APPENDIX 2: THE PRINCE OF ROSH OR THE CHIEF PRINCE?

Ezekiel 38:2-3,39:1 describes Gog as being: “of the land of Magog, the Prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.” TheJerusalem Bible, New English Bible, New King James Version, and the New American Standard Bible all translate Rosh as a proper name indicating a geographical location. However, other translations (KJV, RSV, NAB, NIV) take Rosh as an adjective and translate it as “chief”: “the chief Prince of Meshech, and Tubal.” The problem is that the word Rosh in Ezekiel can be translated as either a proper noun or an adjective. Is Rosh a proper name or simply an adjective (a description)?

The word Rosh in Hebrew simply means head, top, summit, or chief. It is a very common word used in all Semitic languages, occurring about 750 times in the Old Testament, along with its roots and derivatives. However in these verses in Ezekiel 38-39, the weight of evidence favours taking Rosh as a proper name:

(1) The Hebrew scholars C E Keil and Wilhelm Gesenius hold that the better translation of Rosh in Ezekiel is as a proper noun for a specific geographical location.

(2) the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, translates Rosh as the proper name Ros. This is especially significant since the Septuagint was translated only 3 centuries after Ezekiel was written (obviously much closer to the original than any modern translation). The mistranslation of Rosh in many modern translations as an adjective can be traced to the Latin Vulgate of Jerome.

(3) Many Bible dictionaries and encyclopaedias (New Bible Dictionary, Wycliffe Bible Dictionary, and International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia) support taking Rosh as a proper name in Ezekiel 38.

(4) Rosh is mentioned the first time in Ezekiel 38:2 , then repeated in 38:3 and 39:1. If Rosh were simply a adjective, it would probably be dropped in these two places; for when titles are repeated in Hebrew, they are generally abbreviated.

(5) Most importantly, taking Rosh as a proper name is that it is the most accurate translation. G.A. Cooke, a Hebrew scholar, translates Ezekiel 38:2: “the chief of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal” and calls this “the most natural way of rendering the Hebrew” (The Book of Ezekiel, International Critical Commentary).

The grammar of the Hebrew Bible supports the translation of Rosh as a proper noun denoting a geographical location (see also Young's Literal). Having established that Rosh should be taken as a proper name of a geographical area, the next task is to determine what geographical location is in view. This is what we will do in Appendix 5, where we will discover that Rus is equivalent to present day Russia.

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